

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 03701 172051Z
ACTION NODS-00

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY
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USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY

S E C R E T TEL AVIV 3701

EXDIS HANDLE AS NODIS

DEPT FOR SAUNDERS FROM CHARGE; NEA/IAI FOR AMB LEWIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2
TAGS: PEPR, US, XF, IS
SUBJECT: BEGIN'S TRIP TO WASHINGTON: WHAT IS NEW?

REFS: (A) TEL AVIV 3115, (B) TEL AVIV 3000

1. OBVIOUSLY, BEGIN'S VISIT NEXT WEEK WILL BE SOMEWHATE
DIFFERENT IN MOOD AND SUBSTANCE FROM WHAT IT WOULD
HAVE BEEN HAD IT OCCURRED AS ORGINALLY SCHEDULED. WE
EXPECT THE MAJOR CHANGES WILL BE AS FOLLOWS.

2. LEBANON. THIS WOULD HAVE BEEN ON THE AGENDA ANYWAY,
BUT THE NEW AND POTENTIALLY VERY DANGEROUS SITUATION IN
SOUTHERN LEBANON HAS BECOME THE MAIN FORCE OF GOI THOUGHT.
WHILE IT IS FRUSTRATING TO SEE IT DIVERT OUR ATTENTION

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FROM THE BROADER ISSUES UNDER NEGOTIATIONS, THE ISRAELIS
KNOW (NOT ONLY BECAUSE WE HAVE TOLD THEM) THAT THE TWO
CANNOT BE SEPARATED. BEGIN PROBABLY BELIEVES THAT THE
SITUATION WILL FORCE US INTO RESOLVING THE IMMEDIATE
PROBLEM IN LEBNON IN ORDER TO AVOID SEEING THE PEACE PRO-
CESS GO UNDER. HE WILL TRY TO USE WITHDRAWAL FROM LEBANON
AS A MEANS TO EXTRACT OTHER CONCESSIONS FROM US. MEAN-

WHILE, HE WOULD BE PLEASED TO DELAY CONTENTIOUS ISSUES LIKE 242 AND LANGUAGE ON THE PALESTINIANS FOR ANOTHER DAY.

3. THE PEACE PROCESS. EVEN BEFORE THE EVENTS OF THE PAST WEEK, IN DISCUSSIONS OF THE PEACE PROCESS BEGIN WAS EXPECTED TO HANG TOUGH; HE WILL NOW HANG EVEN TOUGHER. LAST SATURDAY'S RAID ONLY CONFIRMS IN HIS MIND THE RIGHTEOUSNESS AND RIGHTNESS OF HIS POSITIONS ON ALL ISSUES RELATED TO THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM. HE WILL REMIND US HOW ISRAELI ACCEPTANCE OF US VIEWS ON WEST BANK SETTLEMENTS AND PALESTINIAN SELF-DETERMINATION WILL ONLY LEAD TO FURTHER ATTACKS ON ISRAEL.

4. DOMESTIC POLICIES. BEGIN WILL ALSO BE FORTIFIED BY THE REALIZATION THAT THE NASCENT POLITICAL UNRAVELING HERE, WHICH WOULD HAVE PROVIDED THE DOMESTIC BACKDROP TO HIS VISIT A WEEK AGO, HAS BEEN TEMPORARILY HALTED BY THE REEMERGENCE LAST WEEKEND AMONG MOST ISRAELIS OF THE "BELEAGUERED FORTRESS" MENTALITY. HE WILL BE SUPPORTED BY AN ALMOST UNANIMOUS NATIONAL CONSENSUS ON THE NEED TO RETAIN ISRAELI TROOPS IN SOUTHERN LEBANON UNTIL SOME OTHER MEANS CAN BE FOUND TO DENY THE AREA TO THE PALESTINIANS, AND HIS DEFENSE OF A NARROW DEFINITION OF 242 WILL CERTAINLY BE NO LESS VIGOROUS THAN A WEEK AGO.

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5. U.S. PUBLIC OPINION. BEGIN UNDOUBTEDLY BELIEVES THAT THE TERRORIST ATTACK OF LAST SATURDAY HAD BROADENED SUPPORT WITH THE U.S. PUBLIC. HOWEVER, HE PROBABLY UNDERESTIMATES THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE INITIAL SYMPATHY HAS BEEN DILUTED BY ADVERSE REACTIONS TO THE CIVILIAN CASUALTIES INFLICTED IN THE AIR ATTACK NEAR BEIRUT AND THE CONTINUED IDF PRESENCE IN SOUTH LEBANON.

6. THE PERSONAL FACTOR. FINALLY, THE MAKEUP OF THE ISRAELI DELEGATION HAS CHANGED. WEIZMAN WILL NOT BE THERE AND DAYAN HAS RETREATED INTO HIS SHELL IN RECENT DAYS. (SEE SEPTTEL). THUS, WHAT WILL BE SAID BY THE ISRAELIS, HOW MUCH OF THE U.S. PRESENTATION WILL FILTER THROUGH THEIR LISTENING DEVICES AND THE LONGER-TERM INFLUENCE ON ISRAELI POLICIES ALL THESE WILL BE DIFFERENT, AND IN WAYS WHICH ARE DIFFICULT TO PREDICT.

7. BEGIN WILL ARRIVE IN WASHINGTON A FATIGUED AND TROUBLED LEADER. I HAVE FOUND HIM LESS COMBATIVE AND LESS ASSERTIVE IN OUR SESSIONS YESTERDAY AND TODAY. HIS TIREDSOME LEGALISTIC HISTORIONICS HAVE BEEN MISSING AND HE HAS LISTENED MORE AND TALKED LESS

THAN IN THE PAST. WHETHER HE WILL HAVE HIS SECOND WIND
BY THE TIME HE REACHES BLAIR HOUSE REMAINS TO BE SEEN.
BUT I SENSE HE DEPARTS ISRAEL WITH A MORE REALISTIC UN-
DERSTANDING OF HOW CLOSE THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS ARE TO
FOUNDERING AND HOW DISASTROUS IT WOULD BE FOR ISRAEL
AND FOR MENACHEM BEGIN SHOULD THIS HAPPEN. HE REALIZES
THAT ISRAEL AND HE WOULD BE BLAMED BY MUCH OF THE WORLD
FOR THAT FAILURE AND THAT THE COUNTRY WOULD FIND ITSELF ISO-
LATED AS NEVER BEFORE. YOU WILL FIND HIM IN A SOBER,
ALMOST SOMBER MOOD.
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